



## Doing Sweet Briar History:

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# Awakening a Collective Consciousness: The Affects of World War II on Sweet Briar College

By Stephanie John Sage Wilt  
*Doing Sweet Briar History, 1985*

*Given its undeserved reputation as an isolated finishing school, it is easy to imagine that Sweet Briar College remained unscathed by the ravages of the Second World War. On the contrary, the years spanning from 1940 to 1945 marked a major turning point in Sweet Briar history; the repercussions of the international crisis were profoundly felt on campus, and actually served to awaken the minds of many a Sweet Briar student. A new awareness for the rest of the world was felt, and as the role of American women changed in society as a result of the war, so did the aspirations and concerns of the Sweet Briar student.*

*What were the changes brought about at Sweet Briar between 1940 and 1945 as a result of World War II? This paper seeks to describe these changes, as well as trace the expanding awareness of the Sweet Briar student with regards to her knowledge of the world and the recognition of her own capabilities and strengths beyond the realm of homemaking.*

Despite its isolated location and sheltered atmosphere, Sweet Briar College and its community did not remain unaffected by World War II and underwent profound changes between 1940 and 1945. In the years prior to the United States' entry into the war, Sweet Briar had turned its attention toward the international crisis; in December of 1940, for instance, a branch of Bundles for Britain, Inc. was established at Sweet Briar. Activities such as supervised knitting for British armies and clothing drives called for the cooperation of the entire Sweet Briar community, and from January 13 to 18, 1941, an intensified drive resulted in the raising of \$28.90 for the cause.<sup>1</sup> As well as doing volunteer work for Britain, Sweet Briar students kept abreast of the war's progress through a regular column in the *Sweet Briar News* entitled "World News." As the international crisis worsened, however, the College began to examine its policies more closely, recognizing the possibility of U.S. intervention. At a meeting of the faculty on October 2, 1940, it was suggested by Miss Harriet Rogers that the school study local relief ac-

tivities and organizations, consult government officials as to how the school could best utilize its facilities in an emergency, explore the ways in which young women could contribute to national service, and form a special committee to "consider ways and means whereby Sweet Briar can corporately make a contribution [to the war effort]."<sup>2</sup> It was Miss Rogers fourth suggestion that gave rise to the formation of one of Sweet Briar's most important war-time innovations, the Committee on Emergency Service. Under the guidance of Miss Rogers, the committee took shape and on November 6, 1940, she reported to the faculty on its progress. Besides calling for a survey to determine what causes should solicit college funds and the possibility of students performing service outside Sweet Briar College, Miss Rogers urged that the College community maintain a "responsible and cooperative attitude toward health, work, and general life."<sup>3</sup> It was also on November 6 that Professor Beard spoke of the need for vocational guidance among the students, and reported that she had received requests for a placement bureau on campus.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that even before the U.S. became a belligerent in the war, Sweet Briar students displayed an interest in vocational training. This is one of the earliest indications of the way in which the awareness of the Sweet Briar student was changed by the war—they, like women all over the country, were becoming aware of their potential and the contributions they had to make to national service.

The new year was ushered in at Sweet Briar with a convocation on January 15, 1941, at which President Meta Glass discussed national service need. In her speech she stressed the need for "living a life as normal as possible," adding that the Sweet Briar community should begin its contribution to national defense and service by disciplining itself in "readiness for any emergency" that might arise.<sup>5</sup> Nearly a month later, at a meeting of the faculty on February 5, 1941, the President circulated a letter introducing a new course entitled "Studies in the Present Crisis."<sup>6</sup> Offered by a number of faculty members to juniors and seniors and incorporating several different departments, the course was offered in 1941-1942, and again in 1942-43.<sup>7</sup> Another innovation in early 1941 was the introduction of the Student Defenders of Democracy (SDD) at Sweet Briar.

## Awakening a Collective Consciousness

In the February 26 issue of the *News*, an article was published describing the SDD and encouraging Sweet Briar students to become involved,<sup>8</sup> followed by a letter written by Patricia Clements on March 19, 1941 telling how students could become individual members. (Miss Clements was the Field Secretary of the SDD at this time.)<sup>9</sup>

While life at Sweet Briar was gradually affected by the war, so was the livelihood of the College's foreign exchange programs. In May, 1941, when it became apparent that those students selected to spend their Junior year in France would have to stay on campus, the French embassy in Washington remedied their loss by awarding three competitive prizes on the basis of achievement in the French language.<sup>10</sup>

With the advent of the 1941-1942 academic year, the *Sweet Briar News* published an article fully describing and relating the activities of the Committee on Emergency Service to the student body. On October 16, an article was published describing it as a "joint committee of Faculty, students, and members of the Sweet Briar community...set up...to explore the ways in which we could become and keep aware of the problems which the World War is bringing to the world as a whole and to each and every individual."<sup>11</sup> The Committee had by this time greatly expanded and included such sub-committees as Relief, Health and Physical Education, and two more concerned with the discussion of general problems arising from the world crisis.<sup>12</sup> The general committee greatly influenced campus life, serving to constantly remind Sweet Briar students of the world situation and encouraging them to be actively involved in the fund raisers, volunteer projects, and, discussions of current problems sponsored by the sub-committees.

But what exactly was the student attitude regarding the war at this time? The results of a Gallup poll taken at Sweet Briar were published in the *News* on October 29, 1941, showing three results: the majority of Sweet Briar students favored U.S. intervention— of the 290 polled, 67.5% favored intervention, 17.2% were isolationists, and 15.2% were pacifists. Interestingly, these results differed greatly from those of a poll of the American public; 21% voted for intervention, while 79% favored isolation.<sup>13</sup>

Although Sweet Briar opinion seemed to differ from that of the rest of the nation, November 12 saw a joining of Sweet Briar with other Americans in Civilian Defense Week. From November 11-16, 1941, civilians all over the nation waged a "war against waste," which at Sweet Briar incorporated the following: conserving electricity by switching off appliances, saving water, giving generously to relief funds, buying Defense Bonds and Saving Stamps, not wasting food, saving old clothing, and seeking training in practical skills. The article ended with an appeal to the Sweet Briar community to maintain a cheerful, positive attitude:

To be effective, our conviction must be sincere, our efforts continuous.<sup>14</sup>

The "War Against Waste" was a topic that resurfaced a few weeks later, on November 29, when the Committee on Emergency Service held a meeting discussing the various aspects of the subject. It was stressed that a greater effort to conserve manpower and energy was needed, and ideas were suggested such as collecting old periodicals to fill the need for paper pulp, collecting old clothes, and turning out the lights in rooms not in use.<sup>15</sup>

As the nation was thrust into war in early December, 1941, however, Sweet Briar's activities concerning preparedness in the event of national emergency became part of its full-fledged involvement in the war effort. An editorial in the *News* entitled "Business as Usual" on December 10, 1941, called for "calmness and determination" in the face of this new crisis:

"Business as Usual" will mean in our case carrying on our college work as normally as possible...Let us keep our patriotism within the bounds of reason. We are a thinking community and as such we should have a clear-eyed view of the situation...In the years to come education is to count a great deal. The leaders of tomorrow will be the college graduates of today...So let our motto be, as is England's, "Business as Usual."<sup>16</sup>

This editorial demonstrated an ever-increasing sensitivity to the worsening world situation, as well as the students' acute sense of responsibility and their special role in the midst of the war.

1942 and the nation's full involvement in the war brought still more changes to Sweet Briar life. The Committee on Emergency Service began considering measures for defense in air raids, deciding to consider black-out methods, as well.<sup>17</sup> The college catalogue was affected at this time, too; at the January 13 meeting of the faculty, it was announced that during the war years it might be appropriate to include in the catalogue a special reference to all academic courses and extra-curricular offerings made by the college to serve the present emergency.<sup>18</sup> (This section was eventually entitled "War-Time Adjustments" and appeared in the catalogues for 1942-43, 1943-44, and 1944-45.) At the same faculty meeting, there was expressed dismay at the students' lack of concern for health and physical fitness, as the faculty believed that both things were very important in war-time.<sup>19</sup> This concern was so great, in fact, that it caused the College to reexamine the importance of physical education and in 1942, physical education became a requirement for the B.A. degree. It was also suggested that in the second semester of the 1941-42 academic year new courses with a vocational emphasis be offered; students had expressed interest in secretarial training, automotive training, and courses in decoding, to name a few. The students themselves proposed to discontinue certain extra-curricular activities in order to have time to participate in such courses.<sup>20</sup>

By February 4, 1942, five new courses had been established by a special faculty committee, including short-hand and typing, mechanical and engineering drawing, first aid, home nursing, and elementary lab technique.<sup>21</sup> Students were so enthusiastic about taking the extra-curricular courses that they did so at their own expense, on their own time, and without receiving academic credit.<sup>22</sup>

War-time changes extended into all areas of campus life; as prices rose all over the country for such items as coffee, bread, and milk, the Boxwood Inn was forced to raise its prices. The Inn, a popular student gathering place, raised many of its prices by two or three cents in the first week of January, 1942, much to the chagrin of the students.<sup>23</sup> In May, students experienced rationing when the Inn was forced to limit each girl to purchasing one Coke each, as the Coca-Cola supply had been drastically reduced.<sup>24</sup> Editorials asking students for their cooperation and patience began appearing in the *News*, as well as bold, full page ads for Defense Stamps and War Bonds. On February 11, 1942, a new feature called the "Defense Column" appeared in the *News*, relaying the projects of the Committee on War Service. (When the U.S. became a belligerent, the Committee on Emergency Service had changed its name.) Also, slogans such as "Sleep for Sanity!" and "Exercise for Health!" began appearing above the masthead of the paper on January 21, 1942, reflecting the College's concern for good health and well being.<sup>25</sup>

On February 25, 1942, a proposal for a conference on war-time topics and priorities was presented at the faculty meeting. The purpose of such a conference was to stress "the seriousness of the situation [and] the great importance of understanding principles of the problems proposed for study."<sup>26</sup> The proposed conference was named the Institute on National Needs and Resources, and took place the weekend of April 12, 1942.<sup>27</sup> The institute focused on topics such as mobilization of resources and national needs, industry and the war, the social aspects of the war emergency, and the role of the church in the present and post-war period.<sup>28</sup> The Institute involved the entire student body, and met with success. Perhaps its greatest triumph was the further awakening of the collective student consciousness to the graphic reality of the war—this letter to the Editor from a sophomore was published in the April 22 issue of the *News* and demonstrates this point:

It is wonderful to live in dreamland, but we must face reality and we must prepare to do it now. Let's not lose those vivid discussions, that group spirit, and that broader outlook that we had last weekend. Stay awake, Sweet Briar.<sup>29</sup>

In May of 1943, the College published a booklet entitled *Sweet Briar College: A Report on the Development, Activities, and Present Status of the College*. President Glass assembled the information for the publication, describing many of the innovations that had taken place on campus in the years since the nation's intervention in the

war. An interesting feature of the *Bulletin* is the way in which it records how the students' aspirations and interests were affected. For example:

Fewer students concentrate in science and mathematics, although the registration in 1942-43 has doubled in mathematics, chemistry, and physics, due doubtless to the present need for scientific training.<sup>30</sup>

And, regarding marriage and post-college plans:

As in other colleges, the students have been facing the questions of marriage, jobs, and service in the armed forces during the last two years...On the whole, completing their education seems important to the students, and their plans for service in the many places where women are greatly needed reflect their intention to prepare adequately for jobs...<sup>31</sup>

Two major curriculum changes that surfaced in 1942-43 were the reorganizing of the International Affairs major and the combining of courses for special training programs. The International Affairs major was re-oriented to "(a) give basic training to a selected group of students for cooperation in post-war reconstruction...and (b) to create such an understanding...as will enable students to assist in the formation of an enlightened public opinion..."<sup>32</sup> The latter innovation, the course groupings, was done as a method of guiding students toward study that was particularly useful as foundation for professions in demand at that time. One example of such a course combination was that for future nurses: a combination of zoology, chemistry, and a variety of psychology courses.<sup>33</sup>

The end of the '42-43 school year brought a shortage of dining room staff, and the College decided to enlist the aid of students in serving meals.<sup>34</sup> At first, this change was met with great student protest, but the words of President Glass soon silenced all complaints. According to the President:

"...my reply was that Sweet Briar was a woman's college, and that if we had food and could not get it on the table, I hoped we would starve. I then asked the students if they wished to discuss the matter and they said no."<sup>35</sup>

The war effort continued full force throughout the 1943-44 school year; the Funds Committee continued its many charity drives<sup>36</sup> and in order to conserve money, the staff of the yearbook, *The Briar Patch*, greatly simplified the 1944 volume. Photography was handled by the students, and the amount of copy was greatly reduced. In the pages of the annual, the staff wrote of their turning "to the potentialities of campus life"<sup>37</sup> while putting their publication together. Once again, in the face of the international crisis, the stu-

dents had looked to themselves and recognized their own strengths and abilities.

The 1944-45 year saw the early glimmerings of the dawn of the post-war recovery. Although charity drives and other activities of the War Service Committee continued, mention of the Committee itself in the faculty minutes ended by April, 1945.

The following academic year was filled with post-war readjustments and changes. At a faculty meeting on October 3, 1945, the Committee on Advanced Standing decided to discontinue the war measure of counting quality points from other institutions in the Sweet Briar credit ratio.<sup>38</sup> The question of restoring the pre-war vacation dates was raised, with all the complications of changing vacation and exam times.<sup>39</sup> (Vacation dates had been changed so as not to conflict with the RR travel of service men.) Also proposed at this meeting was the possibility of the College sponsoring an Institute on Reconstruction similar to the Institute on National Needs and Resources held in 1942.<sup>40</sup> Two weeks later, the vacations were restored to their pre-war dates,<sup>41</sup> and on November 7 the chairman of the Catalogue Committee announced that it wasn't necessary that year to restrict the size of the catalogue for economic purposes.<sup>42</sup>

The new year brought still more changes; the Institute was scheduled for March 14-16, with lectures and panel discussions involving the entire Sweet Briar community.<sup>43</sup>

Sweet Briar social life swung back into full gear in the early post-war days, entertaining a greater number of male visitors than ever before, such that a "Date House" was constructed on campus to accommodate male guests. Sweet Briar girls enjoyed more freedom, as well, for during the war the chaperone system had been dropped and was never resumed. The absence of gasoline rationing and the multitudes of available veterans greatly enriched the Sweet Briar social scene in 1945 and 1946.<sup>44</sup>

Thus ended half a decade of one of the most important eras in Sweet Briar history. The conflicts of World War II, while tearing nations apart all over the world and claiming hundreds of thousands of lives, actually served to liberate Sweet Briar in areas that sorely needed enlightenment. Sweet Briar fell quickly and easily in step with the rest of the nation as men went off to war and women suddenly recognized their own strengths and abilities outside the confines of their own homes. Students at Sweet Briar from 1940 to 1945 became aware of their roles as citizens and new aspirations were awakened within them—they clamored for and were offered new opportunities in vocational training, and cultivated new strengths that they might never have discovered had it not been for the emergency situation presented by World War II.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sweet Briar News. The following issues were consulted here: December 11, 1940; January 15, 1941; January 22, 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Faculty Minutes. October 2, 1940. 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. November 6, 1940.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Sweet Briar News. January 15, 1941.

<sup>6</sup> Faculty Minutes. February 5, 1941.

<sup>7</sup> College Catalogue, 1942-43. Page 24

<sup>8</sup> Sweet Briar News. February 26, 1941.

<sup>9</sup> Sweet Briar News, March 19, 1941.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. May 7, 1941.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. October 16, 1941.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. November 12, 1941.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. December 3, 1941.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. December 10, 1941.

<sup>17</sup> Faculty Minutes. January 13, 1942.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. February 4, 1942.

<sup>22</sup> College Catalogue, 1942-43. Page 75.

<sup>23</sup> Sweet Briar News. January 14, 1942.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. May 13, 1942.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. January 21, 1942.

<sup>26</sup> Faculty Minutes. February 25, 1942.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. March 11, 1942.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Sweet Briar News. April 22, 1942.

<sup>30</sup> Meta Glass, Sweet Briar College: A Report on the Development, Activities, and Present Status of the College. May, 1943, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Faculty Minutes. June 2, 1943.

<sup>35</sup> Martha Lou Lemmon Stohlman, The Story of Sweet Briar College. Princeton University Press, Princeton. 1956, p. 190.

<sup>36</sup> The Briar Patch, 1944. p. 30

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Faculty Minutes. June 2, 1943.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. October 22, 1945.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. November 7, 1945.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. March 6, 1945.

<sup>44</sup> Stohlman, p. 208.

# The Integration of Sweet Briar

## The Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967

By Katherine A. Hearn

*Doing Sweet Briar History, 1985*

Throughout the mid-1960's, Sweet Briar College was involved in legal action that would change its face forever. During this time, the Civil Rights movement was at full steam, and the question of racial equality was of major importance all over the country. At Sweet Briar, it wasn't simply a question, it was a problem. The college was restricted to whites, and it took nearly four years in court to eliminate that restriction. This paper is a study of that legal action, as well as the statements and opinions of those in the Sweet Briar community and surrounding area.

The founding of Sweet Briar College was due to two people: James Henry Williams and his wife Indiana Fletcher Williams. In 1885, four years before his death, James Williams drew his will, which said:

It is my wish that my wife should by deed or will, secure the ultimate appropriation of my estate, in trust for the foundation and maintenance of a school or seminary...as a memorial of our deceased daughter Daisy Williams. This wish however is to be regarded simply as an expression of my desire and not as a hindering direction....<sup>1</sup>

At the death of her husband in 1889, Indiana Fletcher Williams had her own will drawn, which stated:

I give and devise all my plantation and tract of land known as Sweet Briar plantation, situated in said Amherst County, Virginia...and various other tracts of land, to four trustees. I direct the said trustees forthwith after my decease to procure the incorporation in the state of Virginia of a corporation to be called 'The Sweet Briar Institute.' The said corporation shall with suitable dispatch establish, and shall maintain and carry on upon the said plantation, a school or seminary to be known as the 'Sweet Briar Institute', for the education of white girls and young women.<sup>2</sup>

One year later, in 1900, Indiana Williams died, and left her plantation under the direction of the four trustees. In the fall of 1906, Sweet Briar College opened its doors to the first of its students.

During the 1950s, the United States began to undergo a series of changes, the most prominent of which concerned the problem of racial equality. Sweet Briar felt these

changes, but due to the restrictive clause in Indiana Williams' will—"for the education of white girls and young women"—the college was unable to legally keep up with the rest of America. Officially, the decision to contest the will was made by the Board of Overseers on November 2, 1963<sup>3</sup>, but the idea had already taken root in many students' and faculty members' minds at least as early as April the same year. On April 26, 1963, 124 students signed a petition stating that any qualified applicant, regardless of race, should be considered for admittance to Sweet Briar. On October 8, 1963, 59 faculty members expressed their desire for an open admissions policy in a letter to Anne Gary Pannell, President of the College at the time.<sup>4</sup> The views expressed by the students and faculty were in concurrence with the administration and the Board, which was part of the reason why the decision was made to contest the will. All involved felt that the quality of education would decline if the college were not to eliminate its restrictions. It was felt that quality professors would not want to teach at Sweet Briar, and that students would not receive a sound education—an education for reality.

On August 17, 1964 Sweet Briar College, after much deliberation by the Board of Directors and Overseers, as well as the administration, filed suit in Amherst Circuit Court asking for the right to accept anyone with the proper qualifications to Sweet Briar.

Frank G. Davidson, Jr. and Thomas S. Currier, the legal counsel representing Sweet Briar throughout the case, felt that the original intent of Indiana Williams' will was not to bar blacks from entrance to the college, but merely, as the law required at the time, to specify one race or the other. The main argument for Sweet Briar's case was a sentence in Indiana's will that both the Board and the legal counsel thought was the single most important sentiment expressed in the will: "The general scope and object of the school shall be to impart to its students such education in sound learning, and such physical, moral and religious training as shall, in the judgement of the directors, best fit them to be useful members of society."<sup>5</sup>

It was that idea, that the directors should give the students the best education the college could offer, which Mr. Davidson and Mr. Currier chose to base their case on. However, the Attorney General for Virginia did not read the will in the same light. Two weeks after the request was filed, the Attorney General returned an answer which said that



the wording of the will was clear: the college was founded for the education of white girls and young women.

Since Sweet Briar had not proven that circumstances had changed since the will was originally drawn, the Attorney General could not grant the college either of the alternatives that it had wanted. The first option has already been mentioned—that the objective of Indiana Williams could only be carried out if any qualified person were to be admitted, regardless of race. The second option that Sweet Briar would have accepted was to eliminate the word 'white' from the will altogether. Since neither alternative had been accepted by the Attorney General, Sweet Briar went back to court.

In December of 1964, full arguments were presented to Judge C.G. Quesenberry in the District Court of Virginia. He took the case under advisement and six months later, on June 3, 1965, returned a verdict: Sweet Briar could not admit black students to the college because Indiana Williams had specified white in her will. Judge Quesenberry seemed to think that Sweet Briar was acting on the will at that time simply because of the emotions of the 1960s. "The spirit of the times, or we might better say the hysteria of the times, has probably generated the thinking of the board in this case..."<sup>6</sup> Once again, Sweet Briar was thwarted in its efforts to eliminate the racial restrictions set up by its founder.

Eight days after Judge Quesenberry's verdict, the Board met and voted, without reservation, to continue with the case until "its ultimate conclusion".<sup>7</sup> The Board had the complete agreement of the faculty who had, in March of 1964, made their feelings known during a special meeting. The faculty stated that their committee endorses without reservation the action taken by the Board of Directors to employ legal counsel "to take whatever legal action may be necessary to secure a judicial determination. . . whether we may. . . admit qualified persons to Sweet Briar College regardless of race."<sup>8</sup> The fact that the faculty was in accord with the Board's wishes was an extra benefit that served to help Sweet Briar's case in court immensely.

Not all those associated with the Sweet Briar community felt the same as the faculty. Shortly after Sweet Briar decided to comply with the Civil Rights Act in June of 1965, Mrs. W.L. Lyons Brown, a member of the Board of Overseers for 24 years, decided to resign from her position in protest. She stated that

To violate the trust which we assumed when we became members of the Board of Overseers. . . particularly just one week after the court of our own selection had ruled on the matter, and to disregard a decision of the court without seeking a review of that decision, in order to secure federal funds . . . is to me unthinkable.

It was the idea that Sweet Briar seemed to have so blatantly disregarded the court in complying with the 1964 Civil Rights Act that offended Mrs. Brown and many like her. It

should be noted though that Mrs. Brown did not attend the Board meeting when the decision was made concerning the Civil Rights Act.<sup>9</sup>

From June of 1965 to April of 1966, the Attorney General for Amherst County went to court trying to have Judge Quesenberry dismiss Sweet Briar's case. His argument was that "Sweet Briar did not come into court with clean hands or good faith". He felt that the college was simply out for federal money, and not just action on its presumed morals.<sup>10</sup> The case for dismissal was denied by Judge Quesenberry, but the sentiments expressed by the Attorney General were similar to those expressed often by others throughout the area. An editorial printed in the *Lynchburg News* on May 8, 1966 voiced the same general opinion that the Attorney General had. It said Sweet Briar was trying to change the will simply at the whim of the Directors, without any real thought for the original desire of Indiana Williams.<sup>11</sup> This idea was frequently repeated throughout the case by those in and around the Sweet Briar community, as well as by those arguing against the case.

On April 25, 1966, Sweet Briar took its case to the United States District Court and immediately received a temporary injunction which kept the Attorney General of Virginia from enforcing the racial restrictions in Indiana Williams' will.<sup>12</sup> On the advice of its legal counsel, Sweet Briar made a statement which was the first of its kind in the school's history. On May 28, 1966, the college stated "that a policy of admissions. . . unrestricted as to race, creed or color. . . is adopted and confirmed".<sup>13</sup> Sweet Briar then went back to the United States District Court in July to have the temporary injunction previously given them made permanent. The three-judge panel took five months to come to a decision, and when they were done, they had decided nothing. The judges had abstained from making a decision, so in effect, they had sent Sweet Briar's case back to the state court.

During the five month period of time while the District Court judges were trying to come to a decision, Sweet Briar decided it was time to act on the temporary injunction previously given to them. On August 31, 1966, the college admitted its first black student. Marshalyn Yeargin, a junior transfer from Bennett College, was accepted for admittance to Sweet Briar. Apparently, Miss Yeargin knew of the legal action being taken by the college at the time, but not the extent that it was being taken to. In an interview printed in the *Washington Post* on September 3, 1966, Miss Yeargin said that she "didn't figure there was going to be any big fuss" and that "knowing I would be the first Negro accepted...I feel a little more excited about going there now".<sup>14</sup> Many people voiced their opinions on the decision, but primarily all, according to the college, were favorable.

In January of 1967, Sweet Briar took its final step in its case to admit blacks to the college. The college's legal counsel appealed the previously handed down decision of the state court to the United States Supreme Court. On May 29, the Supreme Court reversed the decision of the District Court, requiring them to come to a decision, instead of ab-

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stain as they had done earlier. Immediately, a verdict was handed down. The District Court of Virginia ruled that Sweet Briar must be allowed to admit blacks, even though Indiana Williams' will had specified 'white', because the state cannot require compliance with the racial restriction because it would constitute state action barred by the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>15</sup> So, on July 17, 1967, the three-judge panel of the United States District Court of Virginia

by unanimous decision permanently enjoined the Attorney General of Virginia, the Commonwealth's Attorney of Amherst County, and their successors in office, from seeking to enforce the racial restriction on Sweet Briar.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, after nearly four years of deliberation both in and out of court, Sweet Briar College accomplished what it had set out to do. The first black student had entered its doors legally, setting a precedent for others to follow. The will of Indiana Fletcher Williams had remained intact, and the College's Board of Directors had done what they felt Indiana intended when she left her plantation to the four original Trustees. Sweet Briar was still an outstanding women's college, and the original purpose of James and Indiana Williams' will was still being adhered to:

It shall be the general scope and object of the school to impart to its students such an education in sound learning, and such physical, moral and religious training as shall, in the judgement of the Directors, best fit them to be useful members of society.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Press release from Martha von Briesen in The Sweet Briar College Case box, Nov. 2, 1963.

<sup>4</sup> Student and Faculty petitions in The Sweet Briar College Case box, April 26 and October 8, 1963.

<sup>5</sup> Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Lynchburg News Article, June 5, 1965.

<sup>7</sup> Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Faculty Minutes, March 19, 1964.

<sup>9</sup> Alumni Council Statement by Martha von Briesen in The Sweet Briar College Case box, October 13, 1965.

<sup>10</sup> Lynchburg News Article, October 12, 1965.

<sup>11</sup> Lynchburg News Article, May 8, 1966.

<sup>12</sup> Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Washington Post Article, September 3, 1966.

<sup>15</sup> Decision of the United States District Court, July 14, 1967, found in The Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967.

<sup>16</sup> Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Sweet Briar College Case: 1963-1967, p. 4.



# Competition At Sweet Briar:

## Development of Athletics From 1906-1920

By Jennifer R. Frost

*Doing Sweet Briar History, 1985*

*From its foundation, Sweet Briar has held that the Health, happy life is the effective life, and that four years of college work should increase both physical strength and joy. Athletics and sports have, therefore, always been an important factor.*

*-Emilie Watts McVea, 1925*

*President, Sweet Briar College*

In her 1901 essay, The Value of Athletics to College Girls, Harriet I. Ballintine of Vassar College determined that since the introduction of athletics at Vassar, the interest among girls in their physical development has been greatly stimulated. Janet Owen, in a 1932 series of articles entitled Sports in Women's Colleges, was convinced that the athletic program at Hollins succeeded in instilling in its students an appreciation of the values and pleasures of regular athletics. Likewise, at Sweet Briar in the early 1900s, a new attitude on women's athletics and competition was forming. In her 1925 speech, My Ideal For Sweet Briar Students, President Emilie Watts McVea stated:

I would have the graduate of Sweet Briar a woman strong in body, sincere in thought, clear in vision; using the larger freedom of today while preserving the courtesy and charm of the woman of yesterday.

Past editions and issues of the Briar Patch and Sweet Briar Magazine suggest that athletic activity, be it intramural or intercollegiate, has played an important role in student life at Sweet Briar since her gates opened in 1906. A history of sports development at Sweet Briar between 1906-1920 reveals that, along with many other women's colleges and co-educational institutions, the college developed an interclass and intercollegiate athletic program suitable to its students and faculty. Once stemming from an attitude of friendly rivalry, the motivating spirit behind athletic activity was now based on competition.

On May 21, 1907, the proposed constitution of the Athletic Association was presented to the faculty of Sweet Briar Institute. Its purpose was to be "the promotion of Athletic Sports." A revised constitution, modified in accordance with recommendations submitted by the faculty and now including the formation of an Athletic Committee whose concern was "the inauguration of new sports," was approved on June 3, 1907.<sup>1</sup> The governing body of athletic activity had been established, and sports at Sweet Briar were about

to take on a new role.

During the first year of the Association's existence, very little of importance took place, and though in 1907 the campus boasted two tennis courts, two boats, and a basketball field, it was not until the Spring of 1909 that "athletics scored the great point for which it had been striving during its whole three years' history." On April 5, 1909, the first Field Day was held. According to the 1910 Briar Patch, this marked the first real recognition of what had been achieved at Sweet Briar in the way of athletics. The chief features of that day included a Basket-Ball game between the College and Sub-freshman teams, High-Jump, Standing Broad Jump, Hop-Skip-Jump, Running Broad Jump, Hurdles, and Hundred-Yard Dash competition. To increase enthusiasm, the faculty presented the Association with a silver cup, the Champion of each Field Day's name to be engraved on it.<sup>2</sup> At this time, participation in Field Day seemed to be a lady-like exercise, but to be named the winner of the cup was bonorable nonetheless.

In time for the third annual competition held in April of 1911, the Fifty-Yard Dash, Baseball Throw, and Basket-Ball Throw had been added, raising the number of events held to ten. According to the Constitution of the Association, no one who was "deficient in academic work or not in good standing with the Student Government Association" was allowed to compete at Field Day. The winner of each event was awarded five points, the second place finisher received three points, and those finishing third received one point. At the end of the day, the school letters "S.B." were awarded to anyone breaking an established record, and the student having the most total points was deemed Champion of the Year, having their name engraved on the Athletic Cup now located in the bookcase of the Daisy William's Gymnasium, Sweet Briar College.<sup>3</sup>

Termed "the greatest athletic event of the year,"<sup>4</sup> Field Day sparked a competitive drive in students never before seen. For the first time, awards for excellence in athletics were given, and preparation for the event was year-round. Field Day marked the point toward which athletics had been striving.<sup>5</sup>

In the early 1900s, when girls "were not suited for the same athletic program as boys,"<sup>6</sup> directors of gymnasia found that basketball was "the game they were eagerly seeking" for women. It did not have "the rough element of football," yet was a "quick, spirited game." It cultivated strength and physical endurance, but was "interesting enough to become a part of physical training for women as football and basketball had for men."<sup>7</sup> In 1910, it was this sport that dominated athletic activity at Sweet Briar.

The college boasted three teams: the Junior-Freshman Team, the Senior-Sophomore Team, and the Sub-Special Team, which was composed of students enrolled in pre-

college courses and later referred to as the Academy. When it was decided that a series of Basket-Ball games would be played among them, the practice, held steadily through the fall, became "even more strenuous" than before. Each team was determined to win the championship, and added "vim and vigor" to their practice, arousing "an increased spirit of friendly rivalry" throughout the school.

When the time arrived for the first game in the series between the Junior-Freshman Team and the Sub-Special Team...excitement was at fever beat. In the midst of much cheering for both sides, the whistle was blown...brought a sudden hush over the whole crowd, and the ball was tossed.<sup>8</sup>

At the announcement of the Sub-Special Team defeating the Junior-Freshman team, "the intense feeling (of excitement) burst into paroxysms of joy, and the champions made a triumphal march from the field of battle." The Fall Basket-Ball Champions had proved to be more than a "friendly rivalry," though not admittedly so. Perhaps without knowing it, athletics at Sweet Briar was gaining a competitive edge.

In 1910, according to the December publication of the *Sweet Briar Magazine*, the "usual amount of importance" was attached to athletics at Sweet Briar. Students "availed themselves of the excellent opportunities" for riding, boating, and tennis; attention largely centered on basketball. At a meeting of the Boating Club during April of that year, plans were made for an aquatic meet, the first event of its kind to be held on the lake. Diving and swimming contests were held, and "those who were sufficiently expert in swimming" were allowed to participate in water polo.<sup>9</sup>

The Association was expanding, and efforts were made to widen the variety of athletic activity offered by the college. Both the Tennis and Boating clubs claimed over one hundred members, and the first intramural tennis tournament was held on campus. During the years 1910-1912, more students than ever participated in athletic activities,<sup>10</sup> and in 1913, La-Crosse was first introduced to Sweet Briar. Under the guidance of Zalenda Brown, Athletic Association President from 1914-1916, many learned "the difficult feat of catching an elusive, hard rubber ball in an unsympathetic La-Crosse stick."<sup>11</sup> The competitive spirit at Sweet Briar continued to grow.

As this time, "athletic zeal burned high in the panting breast" of all those associated with athletics.<sup>12</sup> Greatly responsible for such excitement was Miss Cara Gascoigne, who had served as Physical Director since 1912. An "inspiration to our spirit" and "a spur to our lagging,"<sup>13</sup> Gascoigne took on the instruction of Hockey after its official addition to the Athletic Program in 1915. Although the game had been played on campus since 1909, it was Miss Gascoigne's hope that, someday, "the gentle art of knocking a rubber ball down the field without being massacred on the way" would be mastered.<sup>14</sup>

By 1917, Field Hockey, Basket-Ball, Tennis, Riding and La-Crosse were all firmly established as inter-class com-

petitions. The fact that in March of that year, along with Randolph-Macon, Sweet Briar was the only southern college to be invited to the "Women's Athletic Association Conference" held in Madison, Wisconsin, shows that it stood foremost among southern colleges for the physical development of women.<sup>15</sup> According to the *Sweet Briar Magazine* of March, 1917, the College was represented among the nineteen institutions because two world records for women were held by her students; a feat undoubtedly caused by more than a spirit of "friendly rivalry."

The purpose of the meeting was to "exchange ideas and give mutual help for the stimulation of athletic interests and activities in women's colleges." Topics discussed included methods of awarding points and cataloguing records, organization of activities, eligibility, stimulation of athletic interest, and the practice administration, which suggest a competitive move toward broadening athletic circles. However, resolutions were passed to discourage intercollegiate athletics, but at the same time supported the keeping of athletic records and the publishing of them.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary institutions including Sweet Briar were walking a fine line in terms of the direction they felt women's athletics should take. The fact that women wanted to compete actively was seemingly recognized and for the most part, approved. However, how much women would be allowed to do so was the key issue. Nevertheless, both the Field Hockey and the Basket-Ball teams were competing intercollegiately by 1921.<sup>17</sup>

Sweet Briar's delegate to the conference reported that the College was among very few institutions represented that had a scholastic standard for eligibility. According to the By-Laws of the Athletic Association Constitution, "members of the Association not maintaining an average of at least 70 percent could not hold office or take part in any athletic contest."<sup>18</sup> Sweet Briar was also placed on two of the three permanent committees selected for making the By-Laws for the Women's Athletic Constitution, considered a prestigious honor for the school by all involved with the College's Athletic Association.

During the Fall of 1917, Sweet Briar for the first time recognized Field Hockey as a major sport. Under Delia May Gilmore, the sport was organized and a Varsity team established, thus beginning the Varsity vs. Academy Series, coinciding with the already popular Interclass Series. Varsity Basket-Ball was a new addition that year as well, following a schedule much like that of the Field Hockey Team.<sup>19</sup> Athletic teams were now being more explicitly defined, and a hierarchy was developing. More qualified players were placed on the Varsity team, and one's competitive ability was a factor in that selection.

In 1918, the major change in attitude concerning competitive athletics at Sweet Briar occurred. Nation-wide, women's perspective of their role in organized sports was changed. At Sweet Briar, it was no longer the style to appear "interestingly pale" or "intellectually delicate."

We now realize that we can be interesting

without being pale, and can be sufficiently intellectual without risking our health. It is now our duty as well as our pleasure, and should be our pleasure as well as our duty, to keep fit.<sup>20</sup>

In an effort to accommodate the newly formed outlook, the Athletic Association adopted a new constitution in the Winter of 1918, containing specifications for the incorporation of the Point-System into the athletic program of Sweet Briar. It was hoped that the new system would "furnish an impetus for every girl to come out of some sport."<sup>21</sup>

Some students did not take an active interest in athletics because only "star athletes" received recognition for their efforts. The Point System allowed credit to be given for a greater variety of participation in the College sports programs, thus enabling students who "conscientiously worked for athletics" a chance to win her "numerals or letters" without lowering the standard by which they could be obtained.<sup>22</sup>

Officers of the Association, Heads and members of the Basket-Ball and Hockey teams, May Day leaders, and first, second, or third place finishers were awarded points according to the System Incorporated into the Association constitution. "Class numerals" were given to any girl having 250 points, and an "S.B." monogram presented to those totaling 500 points. For each 100 accumulated over the 500 point mark, a stripe for the sleeve was awarded. Anyone earning 1,000 points received a sweater bearing the Sweet Briar monogram. Included in the effort to broaden athletic participation horizons in 1918, Hiking was introduced for the first time as an organized sport and both Freshman and Sophomores were required to play either Field Hockey or basketball.<sup>23</sup> As stated in the 1919 Briar Patch:

Although Sweet Briar has always stood, and still stands, for sports for sport's sake, it welcomes this new system as a means of recognizing the efforts of everyone who works faithfully in the interest of Athletics.

Competition now played an effective role in Sweet Briar's athletic program. Students improved themselves physically, thus supplementing the academic atmosphere of the College.

Incorporating the Point System into the Association Constitution proved highly successful, and as a result Horse-Back Riding was introduced as an organized sport in 1920. Riders then received points in accordance with the criteria set for Hiking. More importantly, however, 1920 marked Sweet Briar's first year of participation in intercollegiate sports.

Competing in such games had caused a great deal of discussion throughout the College. In late 1919, the Association decided that "games outside the gates" would be beneficial provided that "interclass games were not sacrificed." It was arranged for Sweet Briar to play Westhampton College one game in both Basket-Ball and Hockey. The

Hockey game was scheduled for December 6, 1919, but due to "the extreme perversity" of the weather, was cancelled. But in early 1920, in Sweet Briar's first intercollegiate game ever, Miss Gascoigne led the Hockey team to victory over Lynchburg College.<sup>24</sup> In February of 1921 the Basket-Ball team followed suit, defeating Westhampton in the sport's first intercollegiate competition. "With a team of such individual contortions is it any wonder that the resulting score was 55-22?"<sup>25</sup>

Fourteen years after the establishment of the Association, Sweet Briar athletics had taken the final steps toward a full competitive commitment. According to the 1921 Briar Patch, "intercollegiate athletics built up college spirit and brought about a more broad-minded view of athletics in general." "Friendly rivalry" was still a part of intercollegiate competition, but first and foremost, Sweet Briar athletes now played to win.

The girls at Sweet Briar have always, since the very first year of the College, had an intense interest in athletics, which is quite natural when we consider the almost wonderful advantages which we possess to promote our interest in this respect. Our campus stretches as far as the eye can reach in every direction, providing generously suitable spots for every particular sport...it would be strange indeed if we were not enthusiastic over the advantages which are in our possession to make athletics one of the chief interests at Sweet Briar.

- Briar Patch, 1910

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Faculty Minutes, 1907, p. 39. Reference to Sweet Briar Athletic Association Constitution, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Briar Patch, 1910, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume II. April 1911, p. 230.

<sup>4</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume II. April 1911, p. 230.

<sup>5</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume I. February 1910, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> Chronicle of American Physical Education (1885-1930), p. 441.

<sup>7</sup> Chronicle of American Physical Education (1885-1930), p. 209.

<sup>8</sup> Briar Patch, 1910, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume II. December 1910, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume I. February 1910, p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume V. November 1913, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume VI. October 1914, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume IV. June 1912, p. 168.

<sup>14</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume VII. February, 1916, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume VIII. March 1917, p. 210.

<sup>16</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume VIII. March 1917, p. 210.

<sup>17</sup> Briar Patch, 1910, p. 138.

<sup>18</sup> Athletic Association Constitution, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume X. February 1918, p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume XI. December 1918, p. 56.

<sup>21</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume XI. December 1918, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume XI. December 1918, p. 59.

<sup>23</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume XI. December 1918, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume XII. December 1920, p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> Sweet Briar Magazine, Volume XII. March, 1921, p. 136.

# Making the Cut

The Changing Admissions Standards at Sweet Briar College Between 1906 and 1934

By Joanna Kucinski

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Amy Thomson McCandless claims that in the early twentieth century, southern women's colleges were devoted to "produc[ing] alumnae who would preserve Southern distinctiveness"<sup>1</sup> and found "femininity more valuable than scholarship."<sup>2</sup> It is more likely, however, that southern colleges for women, founded later than their northern counterparts, were just reaching a point where they were established firmly enough to expect their incoming students to have wider, more in-depth educations than before. Until they attained some standing in the academic community, they could not hope to compete with the better-known northern women's colleges for academically talented students. However, it is impossible to prove that there was a trend toward greater exclusivity among southern women's colleges without first examining an example on a small scale.

Chartered in 1901, Sweet Briar College is a small liberal arts college for women located in central Virginia.<sup>3</sup> In the college's archive, it is possible to determine if Sweet Briar's admission standards became more selective between 1915 and 1935. If the requirements became more stringent during this period, the reasons behind Sweet Briar's changing policy may reflect trends all across the South. By comparing the college's admission policy from year to year, using primarily Sweet Briar's catalog, it is possible to trace any change in the traits found desirable in prospective students. The motives behind these changes, whether to enroll only students of higher academic ability or not, may be found in the administration's statements in the catalog; reports from the Registrar's office, located in the *Alumnae News*, can be helpful as well. In addition, the cases of specific students who were admitted though they did not meet all of the admission requirements clarify the college's academic standards. Various other articles found in the *Alumnae News*, promotional brochures, and fund raising materials also explain the reasons behind Sweet Briar's changing policies. From 1906, when the college opened its doors to its first students, until 1916, there was little change in the school's entrance requirements. Each applicant had to be at least sixteen years of age and have completed at least fifteen units of preparatory work, with four units in Latin, three units in English, mathematics, and a second language, one unit in history, and one unit in either a third language or science.<sup>4</sup> Each applicant was expected to show proficiency in each of these subjects through a series of entrance examinations at the beginning of the year. Those who were thought to have an unsatisfactory grasp of one or two of these subjects were

allowed into the freshman class with the condition that they make up all deficiencies within their first year. Applicants who were deemed, by the admissions committee, unprepared for college level courses were placed in the sub-freshman class,<sup>5</sup> along with girls who were able to present statements from preparatory schools testifying that they had completed at least two years of high school-level work. Young women who did exceptionally well on the entrance exams were given advanced standing, as were transfer students from accredited colleges. Those who were able to present certificates from preparatory schools accredited by the college or from the College Board Entrance Examinations were admitted without taking Sweet Briar's examinations.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, the entrance requirements were broad, more suggested guidelines for study than criteria to limit admission. Any literate girl with some educational background could find a place either in the college or in the sub-freshman class. It seems likely that in the college's early years it was difficult to enroll enough students to keep the college running. The first graduating class, that of 1910, had only five students!<sup>7</sup> Sweet Briar probably welcomed any young woman whose family had the means to pay tuition.

Within ten years, however, Sweet Briar College had established itself creditably in academic circles. The school was accredited by three organizations, the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States, the Association of American Universities, and the American Association of University Women, within the years of 1916 and 1925.<sup>8</sup> Sweet Briar was also able to begin offering the Bachelor of Science degree in addition to the Bachelor of Arts in 1917; therefore, the college revised its admission policy, judging the students who wished to earn the Bachelor of Science degree by a new criteria which differed from the older standards by which the applicants for the Bachelor of Arts were judged. Those who wanted a B.S. degree were expected to have completed one unit of work in science in addition to the other requirements, and were asked to have four credits in any foreign language, rather than the four units of Latin expected of students in the other program.<sup>9</sup> This is a significant difference, because it shows that the college thought Latin a vital knowledge for those studying the traditional "liberal arts," but unnecessary for students going into the traditionally masculine disciplines of math and science.

In 1919, two years after the college began offering

the Bachelor of Science degree, Sweet Briar cut out the sub-freshman class so that the school's resources could be concentrated on the upper level classes.<sup>10</sup> This made more money available for academic programs and improved facilities, but eliminated any place the college might have for unprepared students, improving the overall profile of the student body. Sweet Briar, newly accredited and offering improved academic facilities and the Bachelor of Science degree, was able to attract students of higher academic potential. When larger numbers of scholastically talented women applied to the school after it became accredited, the admissions policies gradually became more strict.

The process of changing the requirements was slow; every few years a rule was amended or added. In 1923 Sweet Briar required students to present a certificate from an accredited four year preparatory school, "testimony as to her ability and character," in the form of a letter from the principal, health forms, and a nonrefundable ten dollar fee. Applicants unable to provide a certificate from an accredited school had to show themselves to have an acceptable level of education through a series of examinations.<sup>11</sup> The principal's testimony was meant to assure the college that the applicant was hard working and seriously interested in a college degree, while the fee was an attempt to dissuade girls who had no intention of attending the college from applying. These measures marked the beginning of Sweet Briar's effort to admit only the most qualified girls to the school without over-burdening the Admissions Board.

Further progress in this direction was made in 1928 when the college decided to consider only those applicants whose school completed a formal application and who had submitted the results of the College Entrance Exam with the form. Sweet Briar also declared that the standards of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States and associations of a similar nature in the north and west would be strictly observed. Girls attempting to gain admission by exam would be admitted only if they were thought to be deficient in no more than one elective subject nor any of the prescribed subjects.<sup>12</sup> These changes in policy made the admissions requirements far more taxing than they had been previously.

In 1929, the college completely overhauled the section on admissions in the catalog, reformatting the presentation of the information, adding several entirely new requirements, and incorporating the alternations of previous years more smoothly and in greater detail. The list of requirements is prefaced by a statement from the administration explaining that, because the number of applicants to Sweet Briar was far greater than the places available at the college, they had placed "admissions on a selective basis."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the college wanted "as complete evidence as is possible regarding the applicant's ability to profit by the opportunities which the college had to offer."<sup>14</sup> The college requested recommendations from the principal, parents, teachers, and friends concerning the applicant's character, scholarship, and health, along with the results of any men-

tal tests performed on the applicant. The statement went on to explain that the Admissions Board met only three times a year, in October, February, and May, and because of the number of credentials to wade through, they could consider only those applications which were complete in all details.<sup>15</sup> This shows a far less tolerant attitude than in previous years, when the college made allowances in the application process in order to enroll a full class and keep the college running.

Further refinement of the admissions process was made in 1930, when the college began requiring each applicant to write a letter giving information on personal "background, ambition, and tastes," how they became interested in Sweet Briar, any travel or camp experiences, if they needed to earn their living, and if they wanted a Sweet Briar degree.<sup>16</sup> Not only did the letter help the admissions committee to cull out applicants who obviously did not write well enough to be prepared for college, but it was also an indication of each woman's personality. Sweet Briar was attempting to enroll not only students with ability but those with ambition and perseverance as well. Students whose grades were on the fringe of what the college found acceptable might be admitted if their essays showed a great deal of thought and effort. The letter also helped to weed out those students who had good credentials whose schools were so poor that they failed within the first year and had to be expelled. Bernice D. Lill, Registrar and Chairman of the Admissions Board thought "they were evidently the victims of schools of unsatisfactory standards and were seriously misled when they were encouraged to enter Sweet Briar. How to prevent the admission of these students is a problem."<sup>17</sup>

For many years, the idea of using psychological tests, which probably were really tests of mental ability, to narrow the field of applicants had been discussed, and in January, 1931, at a faculty meeting it was decided that the school would begin to require each applicant to take a scholastic aptitude test.<sup>18</sup> In addition, it was resolved that students about whom the Board could not reach a decision would be asked to take the College Board Exams; it was recommended, however, that this custom be explained in the college catalog to prevent offending anyone.<sup>19</sup> It was also decided that the College Board Exams would be the basis for awarding a certain number of full and partial scholarships which were being offered to increase interest in Sweet Briar.<sup>20</sup> The College was obviously making a major attempt not only to admit only those students who were qualified and could benefit from what the school could offer, but also to enroll students of great potential.

Another program, initiated in 1932, gave preliminary consideration to young women of high scholastic ability before their senior year.<sup>21</sup> Some were encouraged to enter the college a year early without graduating from high school, while others were given "provisional acceptance": they were guaranteed a place in the freshman class as long as they kept up their grades during the final year. The administration felt that this program, which later became



known as "Early Decision...[made] more smooth the transition from secondary school to college."<sup>22</sup> This program also gave academically talented students preference, as they had places reserved in the class before others had a chance to apply.

Through these programs, Sweet Briar managed to attract students of greater scholastic talent than before, and thus raised the school's academic reputation. In the faculty minutes of 1934, there are several cases of girls missing one or two units of work, usually in Latin, who are admitted because they are strongly recommended by highly accredited schools.<sup>23</sup> This illustrates how closely the outlines of the admission policy is adhered to as well as how comparatively high Sweet Briar's standards had become. The college's high standards quickly earned a national reputation.

Not everyone favored these changes, however. Among the alumnae, there were many who favored the traditional Sweet Briar. It was later said "This [disaffection of the alumnae] is typical of good colleges and universities today, with the heavy demand for education and the elevation of standards."<sup>24</sup> The alumnae were particularly outraged by the raised academic standards because in many cases the daughter and nieces of second and third generation alumnae were not admitted to the college as they did not meet the higher criteria newly in place at the school. This was a blow for the college, for most of the money given to the college for improvements came from alumnae. The College, however, decided that it was more important to earn a good academic reputation and enroll talented students than to maintain traditions strictly. Tradition was the reason many young women came to Sweet Briar; to many alumnae the continuation of family tradition was very important. When the school's changing standards excluded many girls whose mothers and grandmothers were alumnae, the college received many critical letters.<sup>25</sup> An impartial observer remarked "In certain quarters it will be found that Sweet Briar has necessarily created unfavorable relationships with some of the alumnae because certain daughters could not gain admission."<sup>26</sup> The key word in this quote is *necessarily*. Even if it meant alienating the alumnae and losing some donations, Sweet Briar had to evolve, changing with the times in order to stay in existence. By raising its standards, Sweet Briar met the need for higher education. If the school had become too bogged down in tradition, it would have eventually dwindled out of existence.

The trend towards greater selectivity at Sweet Briar was begun by the administration; it seems likely, however, that the changes in the college were accelerated by events in the outside world. The major changes at Sweet Briar started in 1917, a year before the end of World War I. The school began offering the Bachelor of Science at a time when women, having experienced work outside the home, would be interested in courses to prepare them for something other than traditionally feminine roles. The time of greatest change at Sweet Briar corresponds with the twenties, a time when women demanded more freedom than ever before. It is only

because of these changes that brought Sweet Briar national recognition that the institution was able to survive the depression of the 1930s.

Sweet Briar College reached the point where it had to change with the demands of modern women or become obsolete. In a remarkably short time, Sweet Briar went from a school for southern girls before they married or became teachers to a nationally recognized liberal arts college, and it did so despite opposition not only from the male dominated society around it, but also from its own alumnae.

Sweet Briar is only one example of a small, southern woman's college adapting to the needs of the "new woman"; there are many other similar colleges across the South. While it is true that these colleges did not offer their students progressive education as quickly as the northern schools, they did so eventually, against pressures not felt in the North, such as the traditionally paternalistic society of the South. Nevertheless, Sweet Briar and other similar schools survived by becoming more selective, reputable, and competitive.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Amy T. McCandless, "Preserving the Pedestal: Restrictions on Social Life at Southern Colleges for Women, 1920-1940," *The History of Higher Education Annual*, 7(1987), 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>3</sup> Sweet Briar College Catalogue, (Sweet Briar Archive, 1907-1908), 10.

<sup>4</sup> A unit is a year's work of five recitations a week in a subject.

<sup>5</sup> The sub-freshman class was an academy to prepare young women for work on the college level; it was above high school yet below college level work.

<sup>6</sup> Catalogue, 1909-1910, 17-23.

<sup>7</sup> *The Briar Patch*(1910), 15-17.

<sup>8</sup> *Sweet Briar College Public Relations Brochure* (1928), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Catalogue, 1917-1918, 16-18.

<sup>10</sup> *Public Relations Brochure*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Catalogue, 1923-1924, 17-19.

<sup>12</sup> Catalogue, 1928-1929, 21-13.

<sup>13</sup> Catalogue, 1929-1930, 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-25

<sup>16</sup> Bernice D. Lill, "Our Selective admissions." *Alumnae News* 1(December 1931), 21.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Sweet Briar Faculty Minutes, January, 1931.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Lill, 21.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Sweet Briar Faculty Minutes, April 4, 1934.

<sup>24</sup> John Price Jones Company, Inc. *A Survey and Plan of Fund Raising for Sweet Briar College*, (April, 1951), 21.

<sup>25</sup> Lill, 16.

<sup>26</sup> John Price Jones, 21.